



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1879-06-25

Letter from John Muir to [Strentzel Family], 1879 Jun 25.

John Muir

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On board the *Gephyra*
between Steelecoom + Olympia
June 23rd 1879.

I wish I could tell you how beautiful
our sail has been ever since we entered the Straits of Juan
de Fuca. The shores are densely timbered with the most lovely Conifers
& Arbutus (Madroño) down to the water's edge & the jutting headlands
Honey, far mountainous, islets, islands, bays, sounds, inlets
& coves are so varied & so marvellously composed
that the whole is one extravagantly lovely fairyland.
And then even from the steamer the glacial hand-
writing is so clear & telling & you so grand a scene
that I have been nervous & excited beyond all
control. I'm sorry I have to do so soon for
the details of this grand poem of God can never
be read by me.

We landed at Esquimalt 3 ms from Victoria & drove
to town along a well built road which merges
around & passes innumerable big upswelling
rocks mountainous fresh & telling scarce at all
changed by post-glacial erosion, & on every bit
of soil between the rocks the most luxuriant &
densest growths of Conifers I ever saw. How fresh
& young & hopeful they are. They bounded the road

like a hedge - whole masses of light & shade in the ferns four to eight feet high beneath, with *Trientalis*, *Sedum*, *Erythronium* & *Geranium*. Here & there a Madrone & the most luscious masses of rose & spirea in full bloom. The rose ten feet high - fls 3 inches diam & deliciously fragrant fairly filling the air. The Madrone is in flr too & so are all three of the *Spiraeas* one purple, two white. One of the white is a bush ten or 15 ft high & the most gloriously luscious in its bloom of all I ever beheld. A branch half an inch in dia would bear 40 or 50 panicles six inches long upon it, bloom on bloom over leaning & overhanging in a perfect storm of extravagance. These roses, these *Spiraeas* these glorious *Conifers* I will have with me forever. The glacial phenomena too are interesting beyond measure. The whole region hereabouts was overswept by an ice sheet from the north. This is Certain. The direction ^{of the flow} at Victoria was a little to the east of North. The harbor is full of rock islets - rocks mountains not at all changed by the action of the waves. They are new born & have but just begun to feel the wash & swell & ripple of the sea.

How strange it seems to see vessels & large towns, or indeed man homes of any sort on so glacial a ground. It is as if one should come upon a town on the glacial plateau above Yosemite. All the scenery of Puget Sound is suggestion of that of Lake Tahoe & it is hard indeed to feel that one is really on an arm of the sea & not rather on an Alpine lake. I could this morning throw a stone into the woods so closely are we passing a lovely promontory. Oh dear! I can tell you so little - We had headwinds & a heavy sea the first two days. Most everyone but me were seasick, the hope & the joy & the eager excitement all vanished from the faces of the afflicted company as if they had been born in the most somber state of mind & had so remained. No company of mourners at the grave that I ever observed were half so deeply gloom crushed. Yet the sea grand & inspiring - the fresh breeze bearing in noble masses & the beam gulls tracing them across an steady wing, warm while we abided in the lee of the cabins, & in & among a company of whales sport - ing lustily & rolling in grand enjoyment while them

I have enjoyed the
 huge hearts went beating through the storm
 bucketfuls of warm blood rushing through
 their veins at every beat, hundreds of porpoises
 two racing & gambolling pitching themselves out
 of the waves in company like wheeling
 boys at play. forming a most startling &
 impressive picture of life in the cold barren
 looking sea-prairie.
 But now we are just approaching Olympia
 & I must haste to the end of my sheet.
 The Captain was good to me & many others I met.
 I forgot to say that the wave tops torn by the gale
 into spray & sand were beautifully irised.
 The waters of the Strait of Juan were black
 as for that cold I had it vanished the
 first day of the gale. blown out like a
 candle. We left the Dakota at Seattle.
 We may return to Seattle tomorrow, thence
 where? The world is all before me.
 I hope to be able to overcome the Saschal
 but I feel it yet. Sent you a line
 from Victoria. Then goes the whistle
 to the wharf. Now the engineers bell sounds
 we slow up. A lovely evening
 Thanks for all the bread & butter

Alhambra, June 27, 1879.

Dear John

After coming home I grew more and more uneasy concerning your Herbarium, until at last it seemed to me that there could be no safety for it except under my care. Before, I thought only of the danger from a fire here, but we have always been cautious and have never left the house alone during dry weather. At Mr. Upham's they could not be expected to leave their own treasures to rescue just a lot of old papers and dried plants; while with me, well, you know only too well how precious in my

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[27 June 1879]

Express to Seattle, the box of promise, and "hopes it will prove of much benefit to your party during the tramp of tribulation."

Yesterday's Bulletin notices arrival of the Dakota at Victoria on Tuesday and at Seattle Wednesday, but no mention is made of stormy weather, although here in our sheltered valley a south-west wind blew furiously nearly all of Saturday. It was more severe than we have had for two or three years! and even papa looked grave when we spoke of storms at sea, so you may know we were thankful when the Bulletin that evening named only a "fine fresh breeze."

There again! Dear John, do not be vexed with me even this time. One can not grow to be brave in an hour or a day,